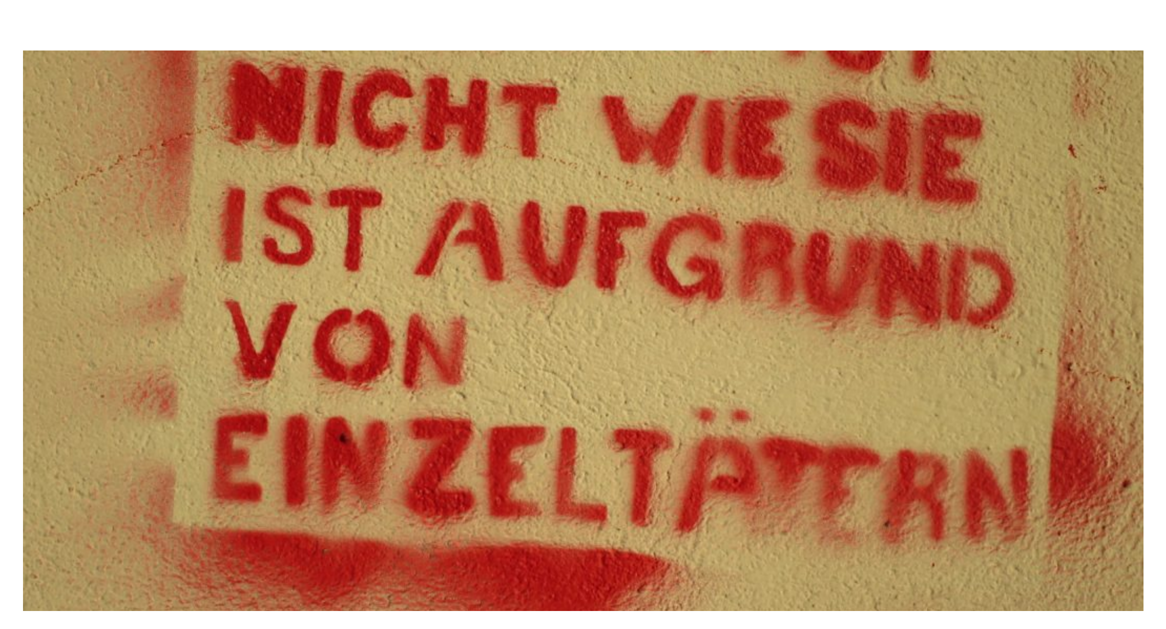






BENJAMIN NOYS 2017-08-02

THE END OF THE MONARCHY OF SEX': SEXUALITY AND CONTEMPORARY NIHILISM

BIOPOLITICS BADIOU, FOUCAULT, NIHILISM, QUEER, SEXUALITY

Abstract:

The hegemonic form of contemporary queer theory is dependent on a model of desire as autonomous and deregulated, derived from post '68 French theory and particularly the work of Michel Foucault. Such a model is at risk of finding itself in congruence with a deregulated post-Fordist capitalism that recuperates supposedly dissident sexual identities. This article returns to the work of Foucault to identity a largely unacknowledged tendency in his work that contests the valorisation of sexuality and calls for an 'end of the monarchy of sex'. This possibility is linked to Foucault's controversial exploration of the concept of 'spiritual politics' through his engagement with the Iranian revolution. Rather than regarding this as a regression into a reactionary religiosity I argue that it forms an inquiry into new political possibilities of revolt. These possibilities contest what Alain Badiou has identified as the nihilism of contemporary capitalism, in which desire and sexuality are deployed to constrain the political imagination to a limited bodily 'materialism'. Drawing on the work of the later Foucault it becomes possible to develop this new politics around asceticism, which is not so much withdrawal from the world but the refusal of the mediations of identity through sexuality and the body.

Keywords:

Queer Theory; Sexuality; Nihilism; Foucault; Badiou; Spiritual Politics

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